Grasping at the Echoes

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Grasping at the Echoes

by YourFavouriteCorvid (orphan_account)

Summary

"I should be asking you the same. What the hell was that, sergeant?"

Soap pulled at his own brain for the "that" the man could be talking about—but the results were inconclusive. He could mean anything. Ghost seemed to glean this for himself just by looking at his face, and shook his head. John couldn't help but feel a little disappointed in his own failure to grasp a simple concept, so he looked at the ground, covered in lush green grass and a few flowers interspersed. But that couldn't be right, he remembered faintly being somewhere else. A city in Mexico, maybe. His arm ached for a moment, and he winced; eyes slid shut and he brought his hand to stifle the phantom pain of a wound long past.

When he opened his eyes again something felt off. The grass was more yellow than before, but just as soft; a child's painting of a landscape seemed to surround them.

Soap doesn't remember much of how he got there, but he's capable of rolling with the punches. He's trying to keep up with the changing world around him, but it feels like he's getting left behind at every turn.

CANNOT BE READ STANDALONE, READ "We Are All Always So Close to Not Existing at All" FIRST

HIATUS

Notes

IT'S BEEN A BIT. Hi! Enjoy.

See the end of the work for more notes

“ *Soap. Soap! Johnny, fucking—LOOK at me.* ”

He gasped awake with wide eyes and stared up into the skyline, endless blue stretching over him. A few clouds hung high in the air, untouchable but alluring, and he felt cold as all hell with bare arms exposed to the downright glacial air around him, and then he laboriously rolled his eyes to lock onto a dirtied skull mask, eyes beneath them blown open to be the size of saucers. Ghost, the bloody saint, sat back on his heels, and John felt himself shift with the movement. Ah, so he was on the other man’s knees then. He languidly lifted an arm to rub at his eyes, but before he could get there a gloved hand took hold of his wrist and pulled it away from its intended target.

Soap was sure the face of betrayal on him was legendary. Ghost didn’t dignify his expression with a verbal response, just shook his head. The sensation of pressure he should be feeling on his arm was only half there, fizzling out on the skin of his wrist. He couldn’t explain why even if he tried, but he felt disconcerted by that. “Ah’m lookin’. What do you want?” There was a hand on his back, and with a significant lack of sensation he realised he was being pushed up, hunching leaning forward into himself. The hand remained, cold and almost tingly. He turned sluggishly to meet Ghost’s eyes again, and found that they were bloodshot. “Are you okay?” John asked, a frown tugging down at his lips.

“I should be asking you the same. What the hell was that, sergeant?”

He pulled at his own brain for the “that” the man could be talking about—but the results were inconclusive. He could mean anything. Ghost seemed to glean this for himself just by looking at his face, and shook his head. John couldn’t help but feel a little disappointed in his own failure to grasp a simple concept, so he looked at the ground, covered in lush green grass and a few flowers interspersed. But that couldn’t be right, he remembered faintly being somewhere else. A city in Mexico, maybe. His arm ached for a moment, and he winced; eyes slid shut and he brought his hand to stifle the phantom pain of a wound long past.

When he opened his eyes again something felt off. The grass was more yellow than before, but just as soft; a child’s painting of a landscape seemed to surround them. He was on his feet, held close to the tall lieutenant next to him. His deep voice buzzed in his ear.

“You know, if you keep up like this we can replace you. It’ll be easy, Johnny.”

“No, never. I live for this, Lt.”

There was a hint of amusement in his voice. “You plan on dying for it?”

“Yes,” He whispered, breathless. He wasn’t even sure what they were talking about, but he couldn’t bear the thought of someone else sliding into his old spot while he’s still alive and kicking. There was only one Soap MacTavish, right? They started walking together, and he realised that their fingers were intertwined, hanging down at their sides to link them both. Could someone else get away with befriending the Ghost, holding his hand? Accompanying him in a place that didn’t quite make sense? Maybe this—all of it, was the other man’s way of letting him down easy; softening the blow. Soap didn’t want to go, but Ghost did and that was why he was walking with him, sending him off.

It was warm. They could walk forever, he thought. So they did, just padding across landscapes too kind for the kind of men they were. Occasionally, a stray helicopter would pass over them and he’d briefly wonder if anyone he knew was on one.

“We hae something to do, don’t we?” He turned to face the taller man and wasn’t sure he liked what he saw—a bloodied mask, bits of facial muscle still attached and dangling at odd angles. *He updated the look, I suppose* . His eyes, a golden brown, searched just past John’s head for a moment, before snapping back onto him. He nodded slowly, like he would be incapable of understanding if every motion weren’t enunciated.

“When do we not?” Ghost posed, and John supposed that wasn’t inaccurate. They were indeed always busy with this or that, dragging through global issues with the weight of entire countries on their backs.

“What’s the situation?”

“Look for yourself.”

He twisted his whole body around, feeling like the air was much thicker than it had any right being, and his eyes trailed up to the stone

buildings he grew up around. He couldn't help but feel a little silly that he didn't recognise they were standing outside of his childhood home, even if he was preoccupied with whatever was going on with his lieutenant's mask. The window was cracked in the corner just like he remembered, a spiderweb pattern isolated to a small patch. It made his chest hurt with some deep pain he couldn't walk off. When his chest inflated without his say he had an epiphany: Someone was breathing for him.

Soap didn't like that sensation.

Assuming it was probably the house causing this reaction, he looked to his right and found a boy crouching next to a bloody, furry mass. The boy cried openly over the thing, while a neighbouring woman stood stock still in her doorway, hand clasped over her mouth. The scene sounded familiar somehow. "This?" He asked, turning to Ghost —only to find an empty space where he should be. Of course, he probably moved forward on his own. He didn't have time to get caught up in whatever personal theories Soap might have. The front door to his old house was ajar, a warm light shining through the crack; the window was still dark and cold.

He walked on unsteady legs to the door, put his hand on the doorknob, and found that it was hot. Hotter than it had any right to be. He yanked his hand away from the metal and shook out the sensation, then pushed the door the rest of the way open.

" *Still responsive. That's good.* "

Soap received an uneasy feeling when he heard that from deep within the house's walls—the feminine voice made him feel strangely guilty, like he was doing something wrong by being there. Still he knew that he had to press on, so he moved forward. His foot met carpet much fluffier than it had any right being after years of it being in the front entrance of a home used by a family of four. (When he looked around he saw items that looked nothing like the ones from his childhood home, but his brain asserted that it was the right place anyways.) On a weight rack to his left curled a snake, gazing up at him. They held each other's attention for what felt like hours, scrutinising… But finally the animal let its head fall, wrapping back up over itself to tuck in.

"Wish I could do that."

“Do what?”

The voice appeared out of nowhere, but he didn’t find himself too startled. “Ye know… Get all cosy like that.” Price hummed from behind him, before he strode out with hands clasped behind his back. Habitual as ever, Soap stood a little straighter and prepared for whatever words came out of the man’s mouth—no such thing reached his ears. They simply stared at each other before Price sharply took in some breath and gestured toward the rack with the snake hanging on it. It looked more like a rope than a live animal now, he noted.

“Well. It’s all yours, sergeant. Blow me away.”

“Yes, sir.”

John reached out and took the snake from its place, ignoring its wild hiss. Without too much thought he placed it on his shoulder, and it trailed down to bite the inside of his wrist. For a moment it hurt, and he jerked at the pinprick sensation. Still the snake remained in place, coiling around his arm. “Is this gonnae kill me?” He asked. Price’s frankly magnificent chops pulled up with the humoured smile that crossed his face.

“No, Soap. It’s helping you.”

He wished he could understand that, but he figured he had more important things to do than try and decipher what that meant. Soap gave a stiff nod, and followed the captain deeper into the training facility, matching his footsteps perfectly. They proceeded in utter silence for some time, not even the rooms around them offering any noise—the world was a vacuum. Gradually more bodies showed up, quietly commencing their own activities such as sharpening knives, or reading books, or grappling with each other without any mats underfoot. Some of them he recognised, but couldn’t put a name to. Others he looked at just a bit too long, trying to figure out if he could possibly figure out who they were.

“You *do* know why we’re doing this, MacTavish?”

He had no fucking idea. “I can’t say I do, Captain.” The snake squeezed just a bit tighter.

“I thought you might like to have a chance for everyone to say their goodbyes.” The man sounded veritably choked up now, and when John’s vision panned to his face he saw a strained line beneath his facial hair. He was trying to keep cool. Why? Soap thought he might be able to figure it out if he was left alone long enough, but rather he was given some sort of energy bar, something he knew he had to keep safe. Ironically, holding it seemed to sap the life out of him, making it harder to drag himself along for every step. Captain Price seemed to sense this, moving backwards with two steps to take Soap’s arm. There was that feeling again, like someone else was having to breathe life into his body. It wasn’t any easier the second time.

He was completely at his captain’s will now, held limply up with his arm wrapped over the man’s shoulders, Price’s arm around his back. He was basically being dragged along while others simply waved at him, wishing him good luck or thanking him for his time or… He wasn’t even sure. There were too many people. One in particular who stuck out was a woman he recognised well, wrapped in the same dress she was buried in. She broke from the crowd after a significant bit of pushing and forcing her way through, and she *ran* to catch up to them. Even mostly limp he found the strength to keep his head turned toward her, because he couldn’t bear to keep his eyes off. Not after leaving her, assuming she’d be okay. He wanted to get to her somehow, tell her that he’s sorry.

But they just kept moving, Soap dragged along like he weighed nothing. There was an urgency in Price’s step, and Soap realised that he was being talked to, or rather talked at. Everyone seemed to think he was dying, except for the woman chasing after him, disappearing back into the swelling crowd.

“ *Come on, son. Hang in for a minute.* ” He yelled out to nobody for help, and John could have sworn he saw a cackling boar’s skull rise above the heads in their swarm. It laughed and reared its head and he couldn’t help but feel a little like it was supposed to mean something, but then again he seemed to be dying, and nothing had to make sense when you were dying, did it? He wondered if this was how his mother felt in her last moments. Confused, calm, aching, wilting away white her daughters desperately tried to comfort her and themselves, positioned over her bed. He wondered if she remembered that she finally had the son she’d always wanted in her last moments. If he even graced her mind.

She was surely burrowing into the folds of his brain, taking up all the space she needed. Snapping back to reality, John noticed Gaz' grip on him changed to be much tighter, more forgiving of his stumbling feet. "Only a little longer, mate," the man claimed, and Soap was sure that if he were any less tired he'd have it in him to believe the other sergeant. He received his reassurance in the form of his friend heaving him up further to get a better grip. He was sure he should feel something other than a fuzzy numbness, with the way Gaz' fingers curled into his side, leaving him no room to budge.

"Where're we gaen?" He slurred, eyes half-lidded.

Gaz laughed. "That's for me to know and you to find out."

"So tell me," Soap whined.

"No."

"Oh, fuck off."

End Notes

Soon I will be DONE with this production of the Wizard of Oz and I will be capable of dedicating a little more time to writing (less exhaustion yfeel) here's the first chapter, just sort of testing the waters! I have like the whispers of an outline written right now but ultimately I'm winging it. The pacing feels a little off but I'm not sure, let me know what you think!

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